

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims, without prejudice, as set forth below:

- 1 1. (Currently Amended) An offline-online points system comprising:
 - 2 a main server configured for providing a user with an interface to submit a code
 - 3 obtainable by the user from an item;
 - 4 a code server configured for maintaining a set of valid codes and for comparing the code
 - 5 submitted by the user against the set of valid codes such that if based on the comparison the code
 - 6 is deemed valid the user is credited with a given number of points, wherein points earned by or
 - 7 credited to the user are accumulated, the accumulated points being redeemable for value
 - 8 including an auctioned item for which the user submitted in an auction a winning bid;
 - 9 an agent configured to participate as a proxy for the user in the auction while
 - 10 participating as a proxy for the user in any number of other auctions; and
 - 11 a database server with an account database having an account to hold the accumulated
 - 12 points for the user, wherein accounts are set up for transferring accumulated points therebetween,
 - 13 and wherein accounts for users that are heavily active are each associated with a credit line and a
 - 14 credit-enabled marker such that if the user is deemed heavily active the credit line associated
 - 15 with the user's account is set up with points for supplementing the accumulated points when the
 - 16 agent participates for the user in an auction. [[.]]
- 1 2. (Currently Amended) The offline-online points system of claim 1, further comprising:
 - 2 a user database ~~configured~~ associated with the account for holding the accumulated
 - 3 points for the user.
- 1 3. (Previously Presented) The offline-online points system of claim 2, wherein the balance of the
 - 2 account is M points prior to the user's submission of the code, wherein the given number is N,
 - 3 and wherein the code server is configured for updating the account balance to M+N points after
 - 4 the user submits the code and if the code is valid.

1 4. (Previously Presented) The offline-online points system of claim 2, wherein the user earns
2 points through auctioning items, the points being earned in lieu of cash payment for the
3 auctioned items.

1 5. (Previously Presented) The offline-online points system of claim 1 wherein the code is C
2 letters in length from an Alphabet of L letters.

1 6. (Previously Presented) The offline-online points system of claim 5, wherein C is 10.

1 7. (Previously Presented) The offline-online points system of claim 5, wherein L is 29.

1 8. (Previously Presented) The offline-online points system of claim 5, wherein L is 36.

1 9-23. Cancelled

1 24. (Previously Presented) The offline-online points system of claim 1, wherein the points are
2 maintained in the account in an encrypted form to prevent unauthorized interference with the
3 user account.

1 25. (Previously Presented) The offline-online points system of claim 1, further comprising a
2 computer program for generating the code, the code being fixed onto a medium such that the
3 code is obtainable from the medium offline.

1 26. (Previously Presented) The offline-online points system of claim 25, wherein the medium is a
2 bottle cap from which the code is readable to the user.

1 27-37. Cancelled

1 38. (Currently Amended) A system for incentive points earning and redemption, comprising:
2 an auction web server with an auction database for auctioning items in an auction;
3 a store web server with a store database for maintaining information on items offered by
4 a business;

5 a web server from which the auction web server and the store web server are accessible
6 to a user for interacting therewith, including for participating in the auction of an item offered by
7 the business, the web server, in turn, being accessible to the user from either or both of the
8 auction web server and the store web server;

9 an agent configured to participate as a proxy for the user in the auction while
10 participating as a proxy for the user in any number of other auctions; and

11 a user database configured for maintaining a user account with points earned by the user,
12 wherein each earned point, characterized as a purchase or attention incentive point, is
13 redeemable for value including an auctioned item for which the user submitted a winning bid
14 price of the item being auctioned, wherein accounts are set up in the user database such that
15 earned points are transferable therebetween, wherein accounts set up in the user database for
16 users that are heavily active are each associated with a credit line and a credit-enabled marker
17 such that if the user is deemed heavily active the credit line associated with the account for the
18 user is set up with points for supplementing the earned points when the agent participates for the
19 user in an auction.

1 39. (Previously Presented) A system as in claim 38, further comprising:

2 a code server configured for maintaining a set of codes that are deemed valid and against
3 which a code submitted by the user is verifiable,

4 wherein the code is obtainable by the user offline, and

5 wherein the user's interaction involves submission of the code for credit, the credit being
6 equal to a given number of points to be added to the user's account if the code is verified to be
7 valid.

1 40. (Previously Presented) A system as in claim 38, wherein the user's interaction involves
2 registration, an indicia of attention to an ad, or a purchase, in relation to which the user database
3 is configured to receive into the user account a predetermined number of points earned by that
4 user.

1 41. (Previously Presented) A system as in claim 38, wherein the user's interaction involves
2 entering a winning bid for the item being auctioned in relation to which the user database is
3 configured to dispatch a predetermined number of points taken out of that user's account.

1 42. (Previously Presented) A system as in claim 38, wherein the points are maintained in the user
2 account in an encrypted form to prevent unauthorized interference with the user account.

1 43. (Currently Amended) An offline-online incentive points system, comprising:

2 one or more client computers;

3 a network;

4 an agent configured to participate as a proxy for a user in one or more substantially
5 concurrent auctions; and

6 one or more servers accessible to the client computers via the network, the agent residing
7 in one of the client computers or one of the servers, at least one of the servers having an account
8 database configured with accounts for users, each user account contains points earned by that
9 user, the user accounts being set up such that points are transferable between them, wherein the
10 points are redeemable for value including an auctioned item for which the user submitted a
11 winning bid via one of the client computers and the agent, wherein the number of points contained
12 in the account of a user is based on the number of points earned and redeemed by the user during
13 interaction with the at least one server, and wherein a user account for a credit worthy user is
14 associated with a credit-enabled marker and a credit line set up with points for supplementing the
15 points in the user account when participating in an auction.[[.]]

1 44. (Previously Presented) A system as in claim 43, wherein the at least one server further has

2 a code server including a code database;

3 wherein the code server is configured for maintaining a set of codes deemed to be valid
4 and against which a code submitted by the user is verifiable,

5 wherein the code is obtainable by the user offline, and

6 wherein the user's interaction involves submission of the code for which a credit of a
7 given number of points is added to the user's account if the code is found to be valid.

1 45. (Previously Presented) A system as in claim 43, wherein the at least one server further

2 includes an authentication server configured for controlling user access by authenticating
3 account information submitted by the user.

1 46. (Previously Presented) A system as in claim 43, wherein the user's interaction involves
2 registration, an indicia of attention to an ad, or a purchase, in relation to which the account
3 database is configured to receive into the user's account a predetermined number of points
4 earned by that user.

1 47. (Previously Presented) A system as in claim 43, wherein the user's interaction involves
2 entering a winning bid in relation to which the account database is configured to dispatch a
3 predetermined number of points taken out of that user's account.

1 48. (Previously presented) A system as in claim 43, wherein the network includes the Internet,
2 wherein the at least one server includes the web server and a messaging server integrated in an
3 Internet server to facilitate the user's interaction.

1 49. (Previously Presented) A system as in claim 43, wherein the points are maintained in the
2 account in an encrypted form to prevent unauthorized interference with the user account.

1 50. (Currently Amended) A method for offline-online management of points, comprising:
2 obtaining a code offline from an item;
3 submitting the code online to a server that maintains a set of valid codes;
4 at the server,
5 _____ comparing the code against the set of valid codes and, if the code is found to be
6 valid, crediting a user that submitted the code with a given number of points,
7 accumulating the points earned by or credited to the user in an account, the points being
8 redeemable for value including an auctioned item for which the user submitted a wining bid in
9 an auction;
10 instantiating an agent to participate as a proxy for the user in the auction substantially
11 concurrently with any number of other auctions; and
12 reserving points from a credit line associated with the account if the account is associate
13 with a credit-enabled marker, the reserved points supplementing the points in the account when
14 the agent participates for the user in an auction, wherein accounts are set up for transferring
15 points between them.

- 1 51. (Previously Presented) A method as in claim 50, wherein the accumulated points are
2 maintained in encrypted form to prevent unauthorized interference with the user account.
- 1 52. (Previously Presented) A method as in claim 50, wherein the points in the user account are
2 redeemable for a gift or a discount.
- 1 53. (Previously Presented) A method as in claim 52, wherein the auction is one of a standard
2 auction, a Dutch auction, a progressive auction, a buy-or-bid auction, and a declining bid
3 auction.
- 1 54. (Previously Presented) A method as in claim 52, wherein the auction involves one or more of
2 an automated closing, automated bidding, automated selling, and auction alert.
- 1 55. (Previously Presented) A method as in claim 51, wherein points are added to the account for
2 the user by authorizing credit points.
- 1 56. (Previously Presented) A method as in claim 50, wherein points accumulated for the user are
2 earned by or redeemed from the user in response to a point-actionable event.
- 1 57. (Previously Presented) A method as in claim 56, wherein the point-actionable event for
2 which points are earned is a purchase, an indicia of attention to an item on a web site, or
3 registration, and wherein the point-actionable event for which points are redeemed is a winning
4 auction bid.
- 1 58. (Previously Presented) A method as in claim 50 further comprising:
2 generating the code; and
3 fixing the code onto a medium such that the code is obtainable from the medium offline.
- 1 59. (Previously Presented) A method as in claim 58, wherein the code is fixed onto the medium
2 by printing the code on a bottle cap from which the code is readable to the user.
- 1 60-70. Cancelled

1 71. (Currently Amended) An auction system, comprising:

2 a server;

3 clients, one or more of which having an agent with each agent being configured to
4 participate as a respective proxy for their user substantially concurrently in a number of auctions;

5 Internet connections interfacing the clients to the server; and

6 a database server operatively connected via a first link to the server and operatively
7 connected via a second link to a plurality of databases one of which being an account database
8 containing accounts with accumulated points that are maintained in encrypted form and
9 transferable therebetween, the accumulated points being redeemable for value including an
10 auctioned item for which a winning bid is submitted,

11 wherein accounts for users that are heavily active are each associated with a credit-
12 enabled marker and a credit line set up with points for supplementing the accumulated points
13 when participating in an auction, the database server is-being configured such that when a bid is
14 submitted to the server during an auction via one of the clients; accumulated points are
15 temporarily removed from their respective account in the account database and set aside for the
16 bid, the temporarily removed points being permanently removed from the account if the bid is
17 successful, and any of the accumulated points whose time has expired are permanently removed
18 from their respective accounts in the database, ~~wherein accounts for users that are heavily active~~
19 ~~are each associated with a credit-enabled marker and a credit line set up with points for~~
20 ~~supplementing the accumulated points when participating in an auction.~~

1 72. (Previously Presented) An offline-online points system comprising:

2 a first server configured to receive online a code obtainable offline by a user from an
3 item;

4 a second server configured for maintaining a set of valid codes and for comparing the
5 code received online from the user against the set of valid codes such that if based on the
6 comparison the code is deemed valid the user is credited with a given number of points, wherein
7 points earned by or credited to the user are accumulated;

8 an agent configured to participate as a proxy for the user in one or a plurality of auctions
9 either separately in each auction or substantially concurrently in the plurality of auctions; and

10 a database server with an account database having an account to hold the accumulated

11 points for the user, the accumulated points being redeemable for value including an auctioned
12 item for which the agent submits in an auction a winning bid.

1 73. (Previously Presented) An offline-online points system as in claim 72, wherein accounts are
2 set up in the database server for transferring accumulated points therebetween.

1 74. (Previously Presented) An offline-online points system as in claim 72, wherein accounts set
2 up in the database server for users that are heavily active are each associated with a credit line
3 and credit-enabled marker such that if the user is deemed heavily active the credit line associated
4 with the user's account is set up with points for supplementing the accumulated points when the
5 agent participates for the user in an auction.